English

Rosselló Nevares kept a suspicious bank account

"Ricky's" professor and mentor reveals his secrets

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Picture taken on July 4, 2013 during an event in Barranquitas featuring propaganda for Ricardo Rosselló's candidacy for the 2016 elections. (Archive/NotiCel)

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Like so many other *boricuas* who live outside the Island, Yosem E. Companys has been closely following the revelations that have shaken the foundations of Governor Ricardo Rosselló Nevares's administration.

But contrary to them, a very intimate anguish haunts his conscience.

"I should have tried to make Ricky take responsibility and stop being a kid forever," he said over the phone from his San Francisco office, where he works as a technology and entrepreneurship professor and mentor with a long and impressive career in the public and private sectors.

His loyalty to another Rosselló, former governor Pedro Rosselló González and "Ricky's" dad, was what prevented Companys from doing more during the years he had "Ricky" under his wing as protégé and business partner. Companys was also responsible for placing Rosselló Nevares in his first political position.

During his conversation with NotiCel, Companys decided to talk about private moments with the Rosselló family due to their current public relevance, especially in light of the Telegram chat kept between Governor Rosselló and his inner circle, which NotiCel started publishing on Thursday, July 9, and which keeps the Governor at the brink of resignation or impeachment. The interview was an opportunity to delve into a message he posted last Friday on his social networks, featuring a powerful psychological profile of Rosselló Nevares.

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¿Apoya la juramentación de Pedro Pierlusi como gobernador pese a no contar con la confirmación del Senado?

- Sí, el país necesita estabilidad
- No, es inconstitucional

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Companys talked about "Ricky's" relationship with his parents, of how the specter of his former campaign manager Elías Fernando Sánchez Sifonte orbited him strongly and early, but above all, confessions made to him by a young Rosselló that are of serious concern and may even indicate possible crimes.

The most crucial moment probably was when Companys and Rosselló Nevares set up a technology company, dreaming of the same accelerated growth as hundreds of other Silicon Valley innovators. Companys asked him how would they finance the venture.

"Ricky told me he had all the money we needed. I asked him whether the money came from his family," he tells. "No, it's mine," Rosselló Nevares responded. "He told me, 'I have a million dollars in one of my bank accounts,' (to which I asked) Where did it come from? He told me, 'Don't say anything, but basically, I'm paid about $100,000 to $200,000 as a legislative consultant, and I don't have to do anything, just give them access to dad whenever they want to contact him'," Companys assured, recalling that back then, he had asked his young protégé whether he felt this arrangement was a little unethical. "I'm on the payroll... that's how things work in Puerto Rico," he recalls hearing Rosselló's respond.

According to Companys, this conversation transpired sometime between 2006 and 2007, when they were starting their business. In 2007, in a collaboration for Huffington Post, Rosselló Nevares referred to Companys as his partner in the creation of a tool to measure public opinion on Barack Obama.

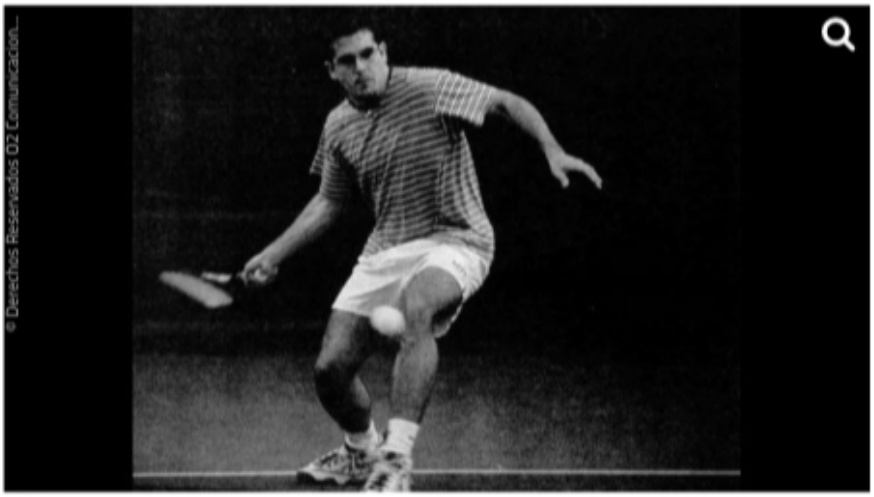

Foto del Massachusetts Institute of Technology, donde Ricardo Rosselló estudió el bachillerato, mostrando a Rosselló en su rol de capitán del equipo de tennis masculino. (MIT)

Picture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where Ricardo Rosselló obtained his bachelor's degree, featuring Rosselló in his role as team captain for men's tennis. (MIT)

The sum Rosselló Nevares mentioned was on an annual basis, and the arrangement included travel expenses, Companys recalls. On the other hand, Companys was not charging anything for his participation in the venture. Instead, he was a passive partner, sharing contacts and ideas with his protégé, and he assumed Rosselló Nevares was, in fact, financing the project with savings, although this ended up not being entirely true. He recalls that the young man told him they could not to spend it all, and that it had to be done little by little.

Specifically, regarding "being on the payroll," Companys did not push him for more information because back then, "Ricky" used to shut down and refuse to talk if anyone brought up the topic of Puerto Rican politics with him.

"He had these behaviors that have only gotten worse because of his rise in power and influence, (but) it was always there, no one put a stop to it," he reflected. "Unfortunately, for Ricky, growing older did not mean he grew any wiser."

After this story was originally published, Rosselló Nevares reacted by acknowledging

After this story was originally published, Rosselló Nevares reacted by acknowledging Companys is "someone I considered a friend," and said "it is completely false that I have any 'suspicious' bank accounts, as the story has been deceptively titled." To read his complete statement, click here.

Pedro's charge

Companys was born and raised in Puerto Rico, from a Catalan father and a boricua mother. He attended private schools but lived with his grandmother, a legal secretary who was an "overzealous pro-statehood NPP partisan" in the Altamesa sector of San Juan. His contact with the Rossellós started when he went to Yale, where he became freshman-senior buddies with Jay Rosselló, who was coursing his last year in college.

Their relationship was a bit distant at first, but as Companys continued studying, he had the chance to coordinate a visit from Governor Rosselló González and make sure the university gave him the "Chief of State" treatment. At the dinner with the students, Companys sat by Rosselló and they got to know each other, starting a friendship the depths of which the young man understood when he visited the Island for events related to the New Progressive Party (NPP) and found out people already knew his name and that the former governor had talked about him as being a "future governor."

When Rosselló González's term ended in 2000, Companys started visiting Rosselló González's home, which is where he met "Ricky." "(Pedro and Maga) would tell me, 'He's so brilliant, he's the brightest in the family, but he's absent-minded because he's so brilliant, so we have to do everything for him, because he's absent-minded," he said.

"Throughout his life, Ricky never had to assume responsibility for any of his actions because his parents –and everyone else, for that matter– always rescued him at the first sign of trouble," wrote Companys, who's a Master of Technology Management Associate Director at the University of Santa Barbara.

For example, he said Rosselló Nevares always forgot his keys at home and someone had to pick him up –back when cellphones were not as commonly used as they are today– to give them to him, something Companys had to do several times. In one of those instances, Rosselló Nevares made him wait two hours at the meeting place and came up with the excuse that they had agreed on another place, which was false, he said.

Desde la izquierda , el presidente del Senado Thomas Rivera Schatz , Rafael Cerame D´Acosta , el licenciado Luis Berríos , el cabildero Manny Ortiz, el exgobernador Pedro Rosselló , el gobernador Ricardo Rosselló y el cabildero Elías Sánchez . (Suministrada)

From the left, Senate President Thomas Rivera Schatz, Rafael Cerame D'Acosta, Luis Berríos, Esq., lobbyist Manny Ortiz, former Governor Pedro Rosselló, Governor Ricardo Rosselló, and lobbyist Elías Sánchez. (Date unknown)

Companys recalled that, when he joined General Wesley Clark's campaign for the presidential primaries between 2003 and 2004, Rosselló González had called him through former Puerto Rico Chief of Staff Álvaro Cifuentes to ask him to help "Ricky" join the campaign as well because, although he did not want "Ricky" to go into politics, that's

the campaign as well because, although he did not want "Ricky" to go into politics, that's what his son wanted. Companys placed him in Clark's committee in Arizona, as assistant to the state director. "Ricky called me, sounding like an eager beaver. He called me every week."

When Clark withdrew his candidacy and endorsed John Kerry, Rosselló Nevares joined his father's 2004 campaign and started reaching out to Companys to set up a company with him. One of their ideas was to keep developing the concept of Rosselló TV, which he had come up with during his father's bid for a second run as governor. Companys doesn't even remember the second idea, and the third was related to surveys and politics. Online polling is an evident obsession for Rosselló Nevares and his now former aides, as sown in the leaked Telegram chat.

The formed the company Auctoritas Lab, and the product was to be named Bullytics, a mechanism to survey people's reaction to a product or candidate employing a scale of values instead of an objective response. However, this did not bode will, and even Rosselló Sr. said as much to Companys.

At Rosselló Nevares's engagement party with his first wife, Natasha Marie Cervi, Pedro approached Companys to thank him for "what you're doing for Ricky, because you and I know this will most likely fail, but you know how Ricky is." Companys recalled that Pedro had even told his son that the business would lose money, that it would not succeed, "but it's a valuable experience for Ricky, so that he can develop some maturity and acquire responsibility."

"It means a lot to me, what you're doing for Ricky," Pedro told him. "For me, it was a touching moment, because it's your mentor saying that about his son."

At Rosselló's wedding, Elías Sánchez was a "real Don" as best man

This relationship allowed Companys to get to know the circle of friends Rosselló Nevares had developed within Puerto Rican politics, the most important being Sánchez Sifonte.

" I think they didn't like me because Ricky used to say I was his best friend. They were jealous of me," Companys said about his introduction to the circle, whose existence he had been previously unaware of due to a quality he had often criticized about his protégé: his secretiveness.

Foto del equipo de Ricardo Rosselló el día de las elecciones 2016. En el centro, al borde de la mesa, Valerie Rodríguez y su esposo, Elías Sánchez. (Suministrada)

Picture of Ricardo Rosselló's team on Election Day 2016. At center, sitting at the table, Valerie Rodríguez and her husband, Elías Sánchez. (Photo provided.)

"I witnessed firsthand how the pressure to seem perfect at all times before others led Ricky to develop an addiction to praise, a tendency towards secretiveness, a compulsion to lie to save face, and a propensity to blame and lash out at others (including myself) whenever he made a mistake in public. Ricky's reaction to criticism, even when constructive in nature, was to vilify the source," said the advisor in the note he posted on

constructive in nature, was to vilify the source," said the advisor in the note he posted on social media.

Companys witnessed the anger Rosselló Nevares felt whenever his secrets were aired. For instance, since they needed a model to make a product demonstration, Companys called Cervi herself to help them, which infuriated "Ricky" because, despite their relationship, she knew nothing of what took place at Auctoritas Lab. "I don't tell her anything about my life... I keep everything perfectly separate," Rosselló Nevares balked in one of several conversations where the young ward shouted and slammed the phone on his mentor.

During his campaign for governor, NotiCel reported on Rosselló Nevares and Cervi's divorce, in which the woman claimed that the marriage had been a farce to assuage certain fears the family had. The woman was not available for interview and the case record, which was settled through mutual agreement, offered no further details.

"Natasha was almost the same as Maga (Nevares, "Ricky's" mother). She ran his life, but he didn't want Natasha to know anything about his life," he stated.

He also stated that, since then, Sánchez Sifonte had been telling him that his father-in-law, former Senate President Charlie Rodríguez, "was teaching him all about politics," something that made a negative impression on Companys, because he remembered the corruption charges made against Rodríguez while he was politically active.

"The joke was that Ricky would someday become Governor," he added, recalling that Sánchez Sifonte was not just the best man at the wedding –he played out the role as if he were the famous "godfather" in Francis Ford Coppola's films. "They made a gazebo for the godfather to given them his blessing for them to marry," he recalled, stressing that there had been a whole allegory with the mafia meaning of the word "godfather".

"He did things, and thought he was so clever for doing them and that no one would know"

The decline of the friendship between Companys and his protégé started in their phase as partners, when one day Rosselló Nevares tried to fool their corporate lawyer by telling him that Companys had decided to relinquish all his stock to "Ricky" as sole owner thereof. That was not true, but when the attorney asked Companys, he decided to play along because there had already been some tension between them and he knew the company could not move forward without the contacts and support he himself provided.

"There was no final product, there was a long way to go. It was vaporware, nothing more," he said about what is considered "one of the worst frauds that can be committed here in Silicon Valley," that is, looking to sell a product that does not even exist. Rosselló Nevares's management of Auctoritas Labs would affect his passive partner in another two ways. On the one hand, Companys's contacts ended up blaming him for referring them to an "arrogant asshole," referring to "Ricky". On the other hand, he had to use an inheritance he had received after his father's death to pay some debts incurred by the company that Rosselló Nevares failed to pay. "Ricky paid some things, but he didn't cover everything."

After two years as partners, and as a result of a medical diagnosis that required his full attention, Companys decided to let things cool down, although he wouldn't definitively end the relationship due to his loyalty to Pedro.

They reconnected over politics, around the 2008 presidential elections, when they joined the Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton primaries in support of Clinton, who lost to Obama. Their conversation then turned to Puerto Rican politics, since Rosselló Nevares was convinced he could win the governor's seat in the 2016 elections, even though he had no prior political experience. The young man asked Companys to join forces with him again for this, but the mentor learned Sánchez Sifonte would be campaign manager, which convinced him not to participate. "I saw Elias as a fake person." The idea was that Rosselló Nevares would serve two government terms in Puerto Rico and would then run

for president of the United States. That way, he would be able to push for Puerto Rico's statehood.

Companys put an end to their relationship after Hurricane María, when he asked Rosselló Nevares himself, and some others close to his administration, to confirm how his grandmother was doing, since he hadn't heard from her. Their response was silence, up to the point when he criticized the government's response after the hurricane on his social networks. Then "Luiso" Rosselló Nevares, Pedro and Maga's second-born, called him to reproach him.

"That's when I said, this is basically the end, I don't care what Pedro might think. It was in bad taste, I felt threatened," he said.

On May 10, 2018, the former director of the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration in Washington D.C., Carlos Mercader, seized the opportunity that the Governor was visiting San Francisco to surprise them both with a meeting. According to Companys, the conversation was short and casual.

In his Facebook post, Companys exposed all the privilege surrounding Rosselló Nevares in his youth, starting at Colegio Marista in Guaynabo, then at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in Boston, where he obtained Bachelor's degrees in Chemistry and Biomedical Engineering, with a minor in Development Economics, then at University of Michigan, where he obtained his master's and doctorate degrees in Science, and at the University of Duke, where he met would-be First Lady Beatriz Rosselló while doing his post-doctorate studies and serving as a researcher. All those universities rank high worldwide, such as MIT, which holds the first place, according to QS World University Rankings 2019.

However, far from justifying his conduct, the mentor assured that "Ricky's" affluent position raised the bar for him in terms of who he should become in life and intensified his tendency to make poor choices.

He explained Rosselló Nevares tended to surround himself with "yes men," people who did not question or confront him when they saw reprehensible deeds, and who followed his instructions to the last detail, even to the point of "purging" those that could have guided him back to the light.

Companys has not read the entire chat leaked by the Center for Investigative Journalism, but in response to what he was able to read, he said, "I thought, this is just Ricky being Ricky in private, but what shocked me was the tone of mockery in the chat. I had never seen that side of him." Another thing I hadn't seen was the kiss-the-ring attitude, where if you're not loyal, you're out. He had these behaviors that have only gotten worse because of his rise in power and influence, (but) it was always there, no one put a stop to it."

Regarding the information revealed about Sánchez Sifonte's interference in the government, Companys responded, "I am not surprised... I never trusted Elías and felt he was looking for the moment to stab me in the back." When remembering the "godfather" dynamics he saw at Rosselló Nevares's wedding with Cervi, he emphasized that "what they seemed to be acting out (back then) has become a reality."

"Ricky chose a path of evil... As the scandal unfolds, I have often wondered whether there was something I could've done to have helped steer Ricky away from such evils and help put him back on the right course. But as the old saying goes: 'You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink,' he reflected on his post.

"I feel I should have said something before," he said in the interview.

Read the complete post here:

What Led to the Governor of Puerto Rico's Downfall?

My Stanford colleague Phil Zimbardo wrote in "The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil," "If you put good apples into a bad situation, you'll get bad apples."

I believe that's what happened to my once mentee and now Governor Ricardo Rossello (or Ricky, as I knew him) during the past decade. ... See More

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